DO FACULTY AND GENDER MATTER TO STUDENTS' ENGLISH PROFICIENCY SCORE?

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Abstract

It is undeniable that English is an important international language and there could be some background variables influencing English proficiency. Therefore, UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta as the context of the study regulates that all students take an English proficiency test once they are accepted and must achieve 450 for non-English departments and 500 for English studies before they graduate. Having 12 faculties of Islamic and non-Islamic studies, it is interesting to measure whether faculty as a background variable matters. In addition, female as another background variable has been widely found to have better achievement in language, and therefore this study is also intended to investigate whether gender is a contributing factor to students' English proficiency. The population was all students of UIN Jakarta year 2017, which data of 5089 students' English proficiency scores, faculties, and gender were collected through the information technology center. The descriptive analysis reveals that the lowest score is 240 while that highest one is 570 and the mean score is 383. The ANOVA analysis reports significant differences among faculties: the Faculty of Medicine achieves the highest score (M = 429) while the Faculty of Ushuluddin attains the lowest (M = 365). In addition, female students, as yielded by t-test analysis, are found to have significantly higher English proficiency score. The findings implies the need to pay more attention to Islamic-related faculties having lower scores and to consider English proficiency score as an enrolment requirement especially for the faculty of Medicine.

Keywords: classroom talk; pattern of interaction; scientific literacy; primary science; science education

Abstrak

Tidak bisa dipungkiri bahwa Bahasa Inggris sangat penting dan ada beberapa faktor yang berpengaruh terhadap kecapakan berbahasa Inggris. Oleh karena itu, UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta sebagai konteks studi ini mewajibkan semua mahasiswa yang diterima untuk mengikuti tes kecakapan berbahasa Inggrisd dan harus mencapai skor 450 untuk mahasiswa di luar prodi Bahasa Inggris dan 500 untuk prodi Bahasa Inggris sebelum mereka lulus. Dengan 12 fakultas baik studi Islam maupun non-Islam, menjadi menarik untuk melihat apakah fakultas sebagai sebuah variabel memiliki pengaruh. Selain itu, jender (perempuan) sebagai variabel lain sudah banyak ditemukan oleh studi lain memiliki prestasi yang lebih unggul dalam kecakapan berbahasa, dan oleh karena itu studi ini juga bertujuan untuk mengukur apakah gender merupakah faktor yang berpengaruh terhadap kecapakan berbahasa Inggris. Populasi studi ini adalah mahasiswa UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta angkatan 2017, di mana data skor English Proficiency Test, asal fakultas dan jender sejumlah 5089 mahasiswa berhasil dikumpulkan dan Pustipanda. Dari analisis deskriptif statistik ditemukan bahwa skor terendah adalah 240 sedangkan tertinggi adalah 570 dan nilai rata-ratanya sebesar 383. Hasil analisis ANOVA menunjukkan adanya perbedaan yang signifikan diantara fakultas, di mana Fakultas Kedokteran memiliki nilai rata-rata tertinggi (429) sementara Fakultas Ushuluddin memiliki nilai rata-rata terendah (365). Mahasiswa (perempuan), sebagaimana ditunjukkan oleh hasil analisis t-test, memiliki nilai rata-rata yang secara signifikan lebih tinggi dibanding mahasiswa (laki-laki).

Kata kunci: tes kecakapan berbahasa inggris; variabel latar belakang; faktor kontribusi; fakultas; gender

Introduction

It has been widely acknowledged that English is one of the most important international languages in the world in many aspects including academic and non-academic spheres. One strong reason as has been stated by Mahu (2012) is the fact that it is the most spoken language around the world. Reddy (2016) adds relevant information that there are 375 million English native speakers and 750 million English as a second language speakers in addition to 70 countries using English as their official language. More importantly, there have been studies showing the positive effects of English proficiency on the success of not only one's academic performance but also social and economic lives (Li, Chen, &Duanmu, 2010, Martirosyan, Hwang, & Wanjohi, 2015, Miley & Farmer, 2017).

In this case, it is considered crucial to firstly define the term "proficiency" to clarify the concept. It is important to note here that the US government agencies, particularly the Foreign Service Institute (FSI) was the one which firstly proposed the term proficiency to enable the agency to create an instrument or tool to identify, assess, and label foreign language skills required to fulfill important work qualifications. (Leaver & Shekhtman, 2004). Additionally, Hughes (1989) further classifies English proficiency test in terms of two general categories of English proficiency test: (1) an English test with a specific purpose and therefore "proficient" is meant to identify somebody who has relevant knowledge to fulfill a purpose, (2) an English test with a general purpose, which results indicate achievement over specified abilities. In line with this, Davies et al. (as cited in Read, 2015) argues that language proficiency is "ability to do something specific in the language", and "performance as measured by a particular testing procedure".

Since then, the term English Proficiency Test (EPT) has been used to examine somebody's overall proficiency. Furthermore, it is also important to note here that proficiency is often confused with competence. Ellis (1997) explains that competence is one of the parts constituting proficiency and further states that EPT specification normally comes from the theory of language ability which consists of language knowledge, sociolinguistic knowledge, and strategic knowledge. As has been argued by many experts including Ellis (1997), language knowledge involves several aspects such as organizational and pragmatic knowledge and strategic competence in which there are goal setting, appraising, and planning.

There are some English proficiency tests, the two most widely of which are the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) and the Test of English as Foreign Language (TOEFL). TOEFL scores are normally used in the USA, Canada, and other countries in America, whereas IELTS is mostly used in the United Kingdom, Australia, and other countries in Europe and also in several parts of Asia. Both tests measures functional skills, which tasks stimulate language use situations.

There are of course some factors which can influence somebody's language proficiency. Some experts such as Carhill, Suárez-Orozco, and Páez (2008), Ellis (1997), and Ortega (2013) have strongly argued that enabling environment for exposure is a pivotal aspect in the success of language learning. Other factors include prior academic achievement (Azkiyah, 2017, McKenzie, Gow, & Schweitzer, 2004), and learning strategies and approaches (Duff, Boyle, Dunleavy, & Ferguson, 2004). Quite recently, Kane, Taylor, Tyler, & Wooten (2010) and Li, Chen, & Duanmu (2010) have also examined the relationship between various demographic features such as gender and age and

academic performance including language achievement.

With regards to gender, a number of studies such as Główka (2014), Kane, et al. (2010), Murphy (2010), Li, et al. (2010) and van der Slik, van Hout, &Schepens, J.J. (2015) have clearly indicated that girls significantly outperformed their male counterpart in language. The study of Kane et al. (2010) for instance reveals that female students in many parts of the world have been consistently found to achieve better on reading comprehension. Similarly, Główka (2014) compares English achievement of 549 Polish students based on their gender and reports a significantly higher achievement of female students (M = 3.99, SD = .97) compared to male students (M = 3.71, SD = 1.10), F (1, 506), p < .002. Furthermore, large-scale research comprising of 27,119 adult learners of Dutch as a second language carried out by van der Slik, van Hout, &Schepens (2015) shows a similar finding in which female students consistently achieved better in speaking and writing in Dutch although no gender-based difference was observed in reading and listening. Overall, these studies have concluded the significant role of gender in language proficiency and therefore, this paper also considers the importance of investigating the effect of gender on English language proficiency.

Referring to the aforementioned importance of English, UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta as the context of the study, through Rector's Decree Un.01/R/HK.005/233/2012, Requires all students to achieve a minimum score of 450 of English Proficiency Test for non-English departments and 500 for English departments (both education and literature) before they graduate. Moreover, the university has been striving toward a world-class university, which of course requires all stakeholders including the students to be able to use English fluently. Through the language center, the

university has created its own English proficiency test for all students coming from 12 different faculties. Once they are accepted in the entrance examination, they have to attend a language proficiency test organized by the language center, which scoring system is modified from the paper-based TOEFL test.

The university has 12 faculties ranging from Islamic studies to science-related departments which of course have different characteristics. A preliminary research on the English Proficiency score of the student year 2017was conducted prior to this study, one of which findings informed that nearly 90% of students as a whole did not pass the minimum requirement which is 450 for non-English studies. However, it is not known yet whether there are statistical differences among different faculties especially concerning the difference between Islamic and non-Islamic faculties and therefore, it is important to conduct this study. In addition, given the finding of previous research on the strong effect of gender on language proficiency, it is also pivotal to examine whether female students as have been found by previous studies, have significantly higher achievement than their male counterpart.

In summary, this study is intended to examine the roles of background characteristics namely faculty and gender on English proficiency. In other words, there are two research questions raised in the study. The first one is whether faculty makes any differences in students' English proficiency and the second one is whether female students outperform male students. The understanding of the roles of these background characteristics will be very useful to be used as filters in prioritizing which types (faculty and gender) of students should be given more attention or assistance to improve their English language proficiency.

Method

The study employs quantitative approach, in which ex-post facto is used as the design of the study in order to test the roles of faculty and gender in English proficiency. The data include the records of students' English proficiency scores, gender, and faculties, collected through the information and technology center.

Concerning the research population, the research involves all 12 faculties of UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta year 2017, which total student amounts to 5584. However, at the end, the data of English proficiency scores, faculties, and gender of 5089 students coming from all 12 faculties could be gathered and analyzed in this study.

Concerning the data analysis, two types of analyses were employed in order to address the two research questions raised in this study. The first analysis was descriptive study to present the raw findings which consist of mean scores, mode, median and standards deviation of English proficiency as a whole and of each faculty and gender. The second ones were the statistical analyses using SPSS, which were ANOVA and *t*-test to test the differences of English proficiency scores among faculties and between the two genders respectively.

Results and Discussion

The Results in this study are presented according to the types of data analysis conducted, namely descriptive and statistical analysis. The descriptive Results describe students' English proficiency of all participating students and based on faculty and gender while the statistical analysis examines whether there are significant differences of English proficiency scores among different faculties and between female and male students.

Descriptive Results

Students' English Proficiency Score

This section presents the descriptive Results of the data which consists of the mean score, the median, the mode and the standard deviation of all students' English proficiency.

Table 1 The general descriptive statistics of students' English proficiency scores

N	5089
Mean	388,06
Median	383,00
Mode	410
Std. Deviation	43,724
Minimum	240
Maximum	570

Table 1 informs that the mean score of all students' English proficiency for batch 2017 is 388 with a standard deviation of 43 indicating that the gap among the students is relatively wide. This wide gap is in line with the fact that the highest score is 570 while the lowest is 240. Furthermore, Table 1 also informs that in general the students of batch 2017 do not yet reach the minimum score stipulated by the Rector's decree.

Table 2. The Frequency and Percentage of Score Category

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	<349	1394	25,0	25,0	25,0
	350-400	2487	44,5	44,5	69,5
	401-449	1211	21,7	21,7	91,2
	450-500	421	7,5	7,5	98,7
	>500	71	1,3	1,3	100,0
	Total	5584	100,0	100,0	

However, there are of course some students who have met the requirement as declared in the Rector's decree from the beginning, the data of which is presented in Table 2 and Figure 1.According to Table 2, there are 71 (1.3%) students who have scored more than 500 in their English proficiency and 421 (7.5%) of those scored between 450 - 500, making it nearly 10%

of those meeting the minimum requirement of the Rector's decree. This amount is of course extremely far from the expectation, leaving a lot of work for the university to improve its students' English proficiency as required in the Rector's decree.

Figure 1 The pie chart of English Proficiency Scores
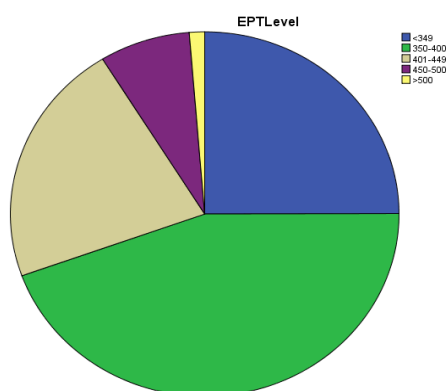
Furthermore, concerning the distribution of scores, the highest percentage is shown by the category of 350 – 400, which is at 44.5%. Rather similar, the lowest category of English proficiency (<349) and that of 401-449 are accounted to 25% and 21.7% respectively. This distribution of score categories can be clearly seen from Figure 1 showing the pie chart of all categories of students' English proficiency.

## Students' English Proficiency Scores According to the Faculty

As previously mentioned, there are 12 faculties in UIN SyarifHidayatullah Jakarta, which scores of English proficiency is displayed in Table 3. It depicts clearly the mean scores of each faculty, which range from 364 as the lowest mean score to 428 as the highest one. The Faculty of Educational Sciences for instance attains a mean score of 383 despite the existence of English Department. Slightly better than this, the Faculty of Adab and Humanity which has English Literature Department, reaches a mean score of 390.

Table 3. The Descriptive Statistics of English Proficiency Test according to the Faculty

Faculty	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
FITK (Educational Sciences)	955	383	38,127	283	547
FAH (Adab and Humanity)	600	390	44,349	283	530
FU (Ushuluddin)	412	365	33,966	240	480
FSH (Syaria and Law)	469	372	37,633	287	523
FDK (Da'wa and Communication)	577	377	36,203	257	510
FDI (Islamic Studies)	138	376	36,693	283	517
FPsi (Psychology)	180	410	47,129	307	540
FEB (Economics and Business)	475	394	43,042	283	550
FST (Science and Technology)	664	402	45,821	250	543
FIKES (Health Sciences)	277	401	42,117	273	533
FISIP (Social and Political Sciences)	242	410	49,170	277	533
FK (Medicine)	100	429	57,565	310	570
Total	5089	388	43,724	240	570

Furthermore, the differences of English proficiency scores among the 12 faculties can be clearly seen from Figure 2, where the Faculty of Ushuluddin stands as the lowest while the Faculty of Medicine represents the highest, with the mean scores of 365 and 429 respectively. In line with this, Table 3 also reports that the lowest score of EPT, namely 240, is owned by students at the faculty of Ushuluddin while the highest score, namely 570 is achieved by students at the faculty of Medicine.

Figure 2 The Plot of the Mean Scores of English Proficiency according to Faculty
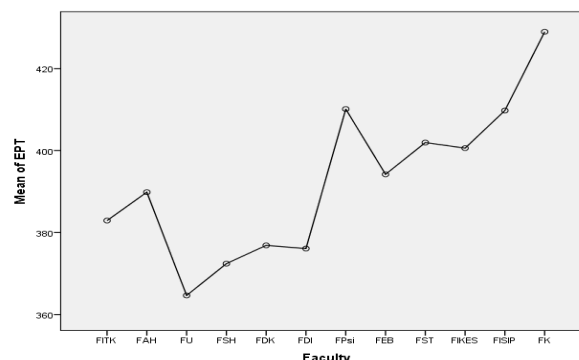
Furthermore, differentiating the faculties in terms of Islamic and non-Islamic faculties, both Table 3 and Figure 2 illustrate that the Islamic-related faculties have lower English proficiency scores, in which the aforementioned faculties, Ushuluddin and Madecine, are clear examples. Another comparison is the difference between faculties achieving below 400 and above 400, in which 7 faculties are below 400 while the remaining 5 faculties achieve more than 400. The seven faculties with a mean score of below 400 are FITK, FAH, FU, FSH, FDK, FDI, and FEB, while the five faculties with a higher mean score include FST, FPsi, FISIP, FIKES, and FK. These descriptive findings, especially concerning whether there is a significant difference on students' English proficiency score among different faculties should be proven with a statistical analysis.

Students' English Proficiency Scores based on Gender

The next background variable is gender, which is presented in Table 4. As displayed in this table, there are many more female students enrolling to the university in 2017 as many as 3232 compared to male which total number amounts to only 1857.

Table 4. The Descriptive Statistics of English Proficiency Test according to Gender

	Gender_ID	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
EPT	Male	1857	383	45,326
	Female	3232	391	42,554

Following the higher number of female students in the university in 2017, the mean score of female students is also higher. Although the mean scores of both male and female students are below 400, Table 4 obviously informs that the mean score of female is higher than that of male. While female students achieve a mean score of 391, male students only get 383. These two mean scores clearly show a difference,

but of course it should be confirmed through a statistical analysis, which will be presented in the following section.

Statistical Results: The Roles of Gender And Faculty

This section will describe the two statistical analyses in order to examine whether faculty and gender as background variables included in this study contribute to the differences of English proficiency scores. The firs one presents the result of $t-test$ analysis to prove whether female students have significantly higher English proficiency score compared to their male counterpart while the second one reports the findings of ANOVA analysis measuring the differences among the 12 faculties in the university.

With respect to the question whether faculty makes any difference, the descriptive statistics presented in the previous section has showed that there are some faculties which English proficiency mean scores are below 400 and those which are higher than 400. In addition, the descriptive findings also show that the faculty of Ushuluddin with a mean score of 364 stands as the lowest whereas the faculty of Medicine attaining a mean score of 428 is the highest. These descriptive findings are tested statistically using ANOVA analysis, which results are displayed in Table 5.

Table 5.The results of ANOVA analysis on whether faculty makes any difference

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1018018,144	11	92547,104	53,949	,000
Within Groups	8709289,358	5077	1715,440		
Total	9727307,502	5088			

Table 5 reports that there are significant differences of English proficiency scores among 12 faculties at the university as shown by ANOVA analysis [F (11, 5077) = 53.95, p = .000]. This finding means that faculty as

background variable has a significant effect on students' English proficiency scores.

In addition, the Bonferroni multiple comparisons (see Appendix) explain the statistical analysis on the difference between one faculty and other faculties, from which we know that some faculties have significant difference in their English proficiency scores. Some examples include the significant difference between FITK and FU, FSH, and FDI, in which FITK is significantly higher compared to the other three faculties. Still comparing between FITK and other faculties, the table also informs that there are no differences between FITK and FAH, and FDI and FDK. Furthermore, another difference is also observed between FITK and the remaining five faculties namely FPsi, FISIP, FST, FIKES and FK, in which FITK has significantly lower English proficiency scores.

Other examples of differences among different faculties are the comparisons between the faculty of medicine and other faculties. Having the highest mean score of English proficiency at the university, the statistical analysis proves that it has significantly higher mean score compared to all other faculties including its neighbouring faculty, the faculty of

health sciences. This means that students at the faculty of medicine have better English competence from the beginning of their study.

Furthermore, the next background variable tested in this study is gender, which descriptive statistics have found that the mean score of female students is 391 while that of male students is 383. Thus, female students have 8 points higher than their male counterpart. Whether this difference is statistically proven to be different is tested using *t*-test as presented in Table 6.

The finding of the *t-test* analysis in Table 6 clearly reveals that this difference is significant at $p = .000$ and thus females' English proficiency score is significantly higher than that of males. Therefore, it is concluded that gender significantly contributes to the difference in English proficiency scores at the university. In short, the statistical analyses in this study have provided empirical evidence on the significant effects of faculty and gender on language proficiency.

Table 6 The results of *t-test* on English proficiency scores according to gender

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference
									Lower	Upper
EPT	Equal variances assumed	6,149	,013	-5,776	5087	,000	-7,330	1,269	-9,818	-4,842
	Equal variances not assumed			-5,678	3671,100	,000	-7,330	1,291	-9,861	-4,799

Regarding faculty as a background variable, it is not easy to find similar studies which compare English proficiency scores among different faculties. However, available studies such as Al Mously (2014), Kaliyadan, Thalamkandathil, Parupalli, Amin, Balaha, & Al Bu Ali (2015) and Setyonugroho & Permana (2015) have concluded that English language proficiency is an important factor in determining the medical student's academic performance. Standing as the highest English proficiency mean score (429) at the university, with its minimum score of 310 and maximum score of 570, students' English proficiency of this faculty is far below the minimum score required in other medical schools in other universities especially overseas since the requirement of English proficiency in medical schools in Indonesian universities is not really known. In Norway for instance, the Arctic University of Norway (https://en.uit.no/om/enhet/artikkel?p_document_id=219262&p_dimension_id=88108) requires all applicants to have a minimum score of 580 for a TOEFL paper-based test or 6.5 of IELTS. This is likely because many references in medical school are written in English and therefore requires its students to have sufficient English proficiency to enable them successfully follow the course.

Concerning gender, the significant effect of gender found in this study supports many previous studies (Główka,2014; Kane, et al., 2010; Murphy, 2010; Li, et al., 2010; van der Slik, van Hout, & Schepens, J.J., 2015) which reveal higher achievement of female students on language competence. Among these relevant research, Kane et al. (2010) review a large number of studies and conclude that female students in various countries have been consistently found to have better scores on reading comprehension. This is one of the reasons why Li, et al. (2010) strongly argue that gender plays an important role in language

proficiency and therefore should be considered as one of key background characteristic.

A possible explanation for this finding could be the evidence proved by an old study carried out by Murray, Johhson, & Peters (1990) which revealed that girls began talking earlier. In addition, girls have also been found to acquire vocabulary faster (Roulstone, Loader, & Northstone, 2002). In line with these two studies, Burman, Bitan, & Booth (2008) report that their study demonstrates greater activation of language areas in girls due to bilaterally stronger activation in frontal and temporal regions of their brain.

Thus, this study has supported previous studies especially concerning the role of gender in language proficiency, in which female students are found to have significantly higher English proficiency scores. In other words, this study has added more empirical evidence on the strengths of female on language competence, which could be related to the fact that girls tend to acquire vocabularies faster and speak earlier than boys as have been found by the aforementioned studies.

Conclusion

This study aims to address two research questions. The first is whether faculty as a background characteristic makes any differences in students' English proficiency scores whereas the second one is whether gender plays a role. Using the data of English proficiency scores, faculties and gender of 5089 students year 2017 collected through the Information and Technology Center, the descriptive statistics show that overall, the mean score is 388 with a standard deviation of 43.7. While the highest score is 570 achieved by students at the faculty of Medicine, the lowest is 240 attained by students at the faculty of Ushuluddin. In line with this, the raw mean scores also report that

the faculty of Medicine has the highest mean score (M = 428) while the faculty of Ushuluddin gets the lowest mean score (M = 365). With respect to gender, the raw mean score of female is slightly higher at 391 while that of male is 383.

The result of ANOVA analysis confirms that there are significant differences [F (11, 5077) = 53.95, p = .000] of English proficiency score among 12 faculties involved in this study. The Bonferroni multiple comparisons of faculties indicate that the faculty of Medicine has statistically higher English proficiency mean score compared to other faculties. Regarding the statistical analysis on the role of gender, the finding of t-test analysis proves that female students have significantly higher mean score of English proficiency compared to their male counterpart.

Thus, this study concludes that faculty and gender make significant differences in students' English proficiency scores, in which the faculty of Medicine has the highest score and female students achieve significantly higher English proficiency score. With regards to the role of faculty, it should be noted that other studies as mentioned in the previous section of this paper have found the positive effects of English proficiency on the performance of medical students and the fact that other universities especially overseas ones require a higher English proficiency. Concerning gender, some possible explanations include faster acquisition of vocabularies and speaking ability of girls and also greater activation of language areas in girls' brain.

The findings of this study implies the need to pay more attention to some faculties especially Islamic studies to improve the English competence of their students. It is crucial for the English lecturers of these faculties to find interesting strategies and materials to provide joyful learning opportunities for the students. In addition, it is beneficial to consider English proficiency score for some faculties especially the faculty of Medicine as one of the requirements for the enrollment of new students. Finally, it should be acknowledged that this study is limited only in UIN Jakarta and therefore further studies should examine broader context to include other Islamic universities. Another limitation is the fact this paper does not yet relate English proficiency score and academic achievement, hence future research should measure the relationship between English proficiency score and academic performance.

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